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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2312
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6827
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4691
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ICRC REQUESTS EMERGENCY FUNDING, TIGERS
REFUSE PERMISSION TO ADDITIONAL AID SHIPS

REF: A. COLOMBO 1399

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1352

Classified By: CDA James R. Moore for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) Director General for Asia and the Pacific Reto Meister and Sri Lanka Head of Delegation Toon Vandenhove briefed Charge' on August 28 on current ICRC activities in Sri Lanka.

Meister contended that the unofficial collapse of the Sri Lankan ceasefire had exhausted local ICRC resources and that ICRC headquarters in Geneva had been significantly stretched by the unexpected war in Lebanon, as well as sustained operations in Afghanistan and Sudan, and therefore an additional \$13 million would be requested for Sri Lanka for CY2006 (ref A). Vandenhove updated Charge' on the humanitarian situation and the ICRC's interactions with the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) since the significant escalation in military engagement between the two sides began in mid-July. See action request paragraph 5. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Meister and Vandenhove traveled to Kilinochchi, in the LTTE-controlled Vanni on August 26 to meet with Tiger political wing leader S. Tamilselvan. An obstacle had emerged, they said, to the ICRC's ability to provide a sustained supply and passenger chain to Jaffna from Colombo to support several hundred thousand conflict-affected civilians on the Jaffna peninsula, and at least 350 more foreign nationals who remain stranded (ref B). Initially Tamilselvan told the ICRC that the LTTE's "preferred" route for humanitarian convoys would be by the A9 highway through the Vanni. Later, said Vandenhove, "Tamilselvan let us know that the first ships had been exceptional" and made it clear the LTTE would not approve additional ships. In fact, he added, the LTTE had not yet granted clearance for the ICRC-flagged cargo which brought food and other aid to Jaffna on August 25 to return. Vandenhove noted that given the Jaffna peninsula's 400K-plus population, the initial delivery of 1500 tons of food would last only a few days.

[1](#)3. (C) Toon lamented that "humanitarian aid has been politicized. We are being used by both sides. Both sides want to continue to fight tit for tat." He reiterated that

the ICRC works on the basis of transparency and must have a green light from both parties in the conflict to proceed with aid work. While the GSL has asked the ICRC "to accompany and confer neutral states to supply ships," the LTTE fears that Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) ships could also move alongside an ICRC ship, protected, he explained. "The problem is that they don't trust each other," Vandenhove added, and "the LTTE doesn't oblige anyone."

¶4. (C) Comment: The ICRC remains a neutral humanitarian organization that is generally respected by both the GSL and the LTTE. Diplomatic missions relied on the ICRC to evacuate the first 162 foreign nationals from Jaffna on August 26-27. Despite setbacks from the side of the LTTE, ICRC-flagged supply shipments are currently the only viable method to bring humanitarian aid to affected populations in the north. The ICRC will update the diplomatic community on the proposed supply/passenger chain on the evening of August 29 and we will report septel.

¶5. (C) Action Request: Embassy requests PRM and other appropriate bureaus to liaise with the US mission in Geneva to consider the ICRC's request for new CY2006 funding to provide humanitarian relief in Sri Lanka. End Action Request.
MOORE